



CITY OF LOS ANGELES
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST
CITY COUNCIL

EN SPIKER

CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

Honorable Members of the Grants,
Housing and Community Development Committee

Honorable Members:

At the meeting of March 4, 1980, your Committee requested this Office to report regarding what actions the Planning Department could take to maximize housing stock within the City. In the following discussion, we provide a brief description of those activities of the Department which affect housing. Also, we have indicated the general direction in which the Department would need to act to increase housing production.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt the attached Resolution as the Housing Production Policy of the City of Los Angeles;
2. Direct the Planning Department to identify all ordinances, regulations, policies and procedures affecting their activities that impact on housing and report to the Grants, Housing and Community Development Committee within two weeks with general recommendations on changes that would increase housing production; and
3. Direct the Planning Department to develop a timetable for presentation of specific changes to its housing-related ordinances, regulations, policies and procedures to allow for all proposed amendments to be considered by the Grants, Housing and Community Development Committee within three months time, with status reports to be presented to the Committee every two weeks.

DISCUSSION

The Planning Department is involved in activities at various levels which influence housing. First, the City's General Plan, including the Housing Element, is the responsibility of the Department. Also, the various Community and District Plans, which provide the land use element of the General Plan, are developed by the Department. In addition, the Department develops the City's zoning and subdivision ordinances, which affect the placement of the City's housing stock.

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Housing Element

In its introduction, the Housing Element states that the principal purpose is to encourage the production of needed housing. One way the Planning Department could act to maximize housing stock is to place the highest priority on implementation of those programs identified in the Housing Element as having a potentially positive effect on residential construction and rehabilitation. Objectives and programs in the Housing Element that involve the Planning Department which can be readily identified as having such a potentially positive effect are discussed below.

The Council-adopted Housing Element of the City's General Plan includes as its Objective No. 1 an intent to encourage the provision of adequate housing in the City, with a particular emphasis on rental units, especially for those of low and moderate income and households having special needs. Programs of this Objective directly involving the Planning Department which could increase the City's housing stock include:

- Facilitating common wall and "zero lot line" construction;
- Precluding the revision of (T) or (Q) classifications to underlying, less restrictive zones after the (T) or (Q) classification expires;
- Using air rights over flood control channels for development;
- Allowing subdivisions of larger homes, using large, single-family homes as multiple-family units; and
- Modifying owner-occupied units to allow additional rental units.

Objective No. 5 of the Housing Element is to improve and conserve existing residential neighborhoods. A purpose of this Objective would be to provide housing by minimizing the unnecessary abandonment or demolition of current housing stock. The Planning Department would be involved in a peripheral manner in implementing this Objective.

Objective No. 6 of the Housing Element is to ensure the development of new housing units to meet the City's housing needs, consistent with good planning practice. Programs involving the Planning Department include: 1) continuing review of the City's Building Code and Planning and Zoning Codes in order to reduce development costs and allow new technology; 2) reducing parking requirements for elderly and handicapped housing developments; 3) reducing parking requirements as a bonus for new and converted multi-family residences where excellent public transportation is available; 4) modifying street standards to reduce land costs in new subdivisions; and 5) streamlining the EIR processing procedures through the development of Master Community EIR's.

In addition, the Housing Element includes a listing (pg. 121) of "Effects of the Housing Element on Housing-Related Policies of Other Mandatory General Plan Elements" which rates sixty-two individual policies with regard to their probable effect on housing supply. In order to help maximize housing stock, the Planning Department could place increased emphasis on implementing those policies which place no restrictions on housing and could delay the implementation of those policies which may further restrict housing until such time as the City's housing situation improves.

Community Plans and Zoning


The City Planning Department is responsible for developing Community Plans as a part of the Land Use Element of the General Plan. The Department has an ongoing program designed to bring zoning into conformity with adopted community plans. The Planning Department reports that the City's population in 1977 was approximately 3,025,151 with a projected population in the year 2000 of 3,191,098. The existing zoning capacity of property within the City is approximately 6,274,700, while the capacity as represented in the Community Plans is only 3,996,400. Housing stock could be increased by planning for higher densities through inclusion of less restrictive residentially designated zoning in each of the Community Plans. In addition, the actual zoning could be changed by: 1) redefining the zoning definition to allow greater density in each zone; or 2) allowing zone changes when requested by individual property owners that provide for maximum development.

Additionally, when zone changes are requested by individual property owners for the purpose of developing property for residential use, the density allowed is often even less than indicated in the Plan. These density reductions are based on a number of factors, including the nature of past and current input from the community, staff, Planning Commission, Planning and Environment Committee, district Councilperson and the City Council. Thus, housing could be maximized by requiring that the maximum density which is designated in the Community Plan always be allowed.

Also, height limitations imposed as a part of the City's zoning requirements serve to restrict density in many instances. Thus, housing potential could be increased by eliminating height limitations or by making them less restrictive. In the same way, slope density requirements are another example of restrictions that limit the amount of housing that can be built on a given parcel of property. Eliminating or relaxing such requirements could possibly increase housing production.

Fees

In accordance with City policy, the Planning Department collects fees intended to recover the full costs involved in the City's review and approval procedures. Housing costs could be lowered if



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the City waived or reduced all fees involving projects that increase housing stock. As an alternative, the collection of fees could be postponed until after issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, thus reducing the amount of the initial investment a developer must make. Such a proposal is currently being considered by the Building and Safety Committee.

Environmental Impact Reports (EIR)

A large portion of all developments require the preparation of an EIR with the average processing time taking from 4 to 5 months. Processing time and cost could be reduced if the Planning Department were to expand its current efforts to minimize the effects of the environmental review process on residential projects.

Tentative Tract Map Requirements

All subdivisions, whether parcel maps or tract maps, must be approved by the Planning Department's Deputy Advisory Agency. Such approvals are subject to numerous conditions as recommended to the Agency by various other operating departments. These conditions involve such matters as grading, street dedications and improvements, easements, fire hydrants, park dedications, parking requirements, sewers and survey monuments. Costs for housing could be reduced by reducing such requirements or by the City paying for a portion of such improvements.

Of course, many of the requirements imposed by State and federal law, City ordinances and departmental procedures reflect the fact that the maximum production of housing exists within a system of urban needs and resource limitations that are interrelated. A balance between various components of the local system must be maintained. However, if it appears that an imbalance unfavorable to housing development has developed due to circumstances within the control of the City, changes in the areas discussed above may be desirable. In addition, many other powerful factors beyond the City's control, such as inflation and high interest rates, are exerting a strong negative effect on new construction. It is, in part, because of the existence of these factors that the City should place special emphasis on ensuring that its own role in housing is not adding to their negative effect if the greatest possible increase in housing production and supply under current conditions is to be achieved.

If we may be of further assistance in this matter, please let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Spiker /sa

Ken Spiker
Chief Legislative Analyst

RESOLUTION

Housing Production Policy

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that it is the policy of the City of Los Angeles to expedite, promote, and support those activities which increase housing production and maximize the City's housing supply.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all City departments and offices whose activities affect housing shall place the increased production of housing at the highest priority within their activities and work programs, with special emphasis on the production of low and moderate income housing, in accordance with existing City policies and laws.*

*(Underlined phrase is the amendment approved by the Grants, Housing and Community Development Committee on March 25, 1980).

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BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED THAT it is the policy of the City of
Berkeley to expedite, promote, and support those activities
which increase housing production and maintain the City's housing
supply.
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT all City departments and officials
shall coordinate their efforts to expedite and promote housing
production at the highest priority within their activities and
functions, with special emphasis on the production of low and
moderate income housing. It is recommended that the City Manager
and the City Council
be authorized to take the foregoing action on the part of the Council, Housing
and Community Development Commission on March 15, 1969.

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